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**‘KNOWING INDONESIA FROM AFAR:
INDONESIAN EXILES AND AUSTRALIAN ACADEMICS’**

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Introduction

The violent lurch in 1965-6 from Sukarno’s Guided Democracy and to Suharto’s New Order was a dramatic and unparalleled turning point in Indonesia’s domestic politics and international relations. Coming at the height of the Cold War, it triggered a major international realignment for Indonesia as the state froze relations with former allies like China and the Soviet bloc, warmly to embrace the West, including Australia. Most dramatically, and now generally known and accepted (although specific statistics are elusive), it was accompanied by the slaughter of more than half a million Indonesian leftists and the incarceration without trial of tens of thousands of others, many for periods up to 1979.²

¹ This paper was presented to the 17th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Melbourne 1-3 July 2008. It has been peer reviewed via a double blind referee process and appears on the Conference Proceedings Website by the permission of the author who retains copyright. This paper may be downloaded for fair use under the Copyright Act (1954), its later amendments and other relevant legislation. I would like to thank Dr Jemma Purdey for convening the panel on the theme ‘Ways of Knowing Indonesia: Scholarship and Engagement in the Australian Academy’, to which this paper was a contribution.

² Valuable studies of the killings by Robert Cribb include, ‘Problems in the Historiography of the Killings in Indonesia’ in Robert Cribb (ed.) *The Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966*, Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, No. 21, Clayton, Monash CSEAS, 1990; ‘How Many Deaths? Problems in the statistics of massacre in Indonesia (1965-1966) and East Timor (1975-1980)’, in Ingrid Wessel and Georgia Wimhöfer (eds)

Among the victims of this seismic diplomatic shift, but less frequently calculated in the cost, were the many hundreds, if not thousands, of Indonesian leftists trapped abroad who, if they chose to return to their homeland, would have faced the imprisonment or death that had befallen their political comrades. In their search for political refuge they scattered across states in Asia and Europe, relocating as host states' international alignments shifted in the Sino-Soviet split and in the Cold War's thaw. For decades these exiles lobbied, wrote, and self-published a wide range of material, including both about their experiences in exile and their analyses of Indonesian homeland politics.

In outlining an exploratory study of these exilic communities, this paper also tentatively broaches a collective silence, or at least an apparent lack of academic study in Australia, about Indonesian political exiles. It is not its proposition to compare experiences of these exiles with the victims *in* Indonesia killed and imprisoned. Instead, it poses the curious question why so little attention was directed at exilic communities (and why so few academic connections were fostered) when their existence was relatively common knowledge – or at least a matter of rumour or occasional note – amongst Australian Indonesianists. Instead, Indonesian exiles and Australian academics maintained very separate perspectives while both 'knowing Indonesia' from afar. It is unavoidably a view from Australia; the perspectives from other locations would (one suspects) be very different. The awareness of the exile communities is far greater in Paris or the Netherlands, for example, since it is to such locations that the largest numbers of exiles gravitated.

A study of the cultural history of Indonesians in exile after 1965 may contribute to post-1998 re-evaluations of Indonesia national history (including literary history) within Indonesia. As an introductory step, this particular paper responds to the conference panel's theme, 'Ways of knowing Indonesia: Scholarship and engagement in the Australian academy', by attempting to question the interaction of scholarship and engagement, and specifically the role we play as Australian scholars of Indonesia and the issues we choose to pursue (or not pursue) in that scholarship.

Indonesia has a long history of exilic writing stretching back to its colonial past. Pre-Independence labour leader Tan Malaka, for example, was exiled to Europe by the Dutch colonial government in 1922 and spent the next 20 years working with labour movements internationally before returning to Indonesia to re-establish the Communist Party. His experiences resulted in the three volume account, *From Jail to Jail*.³

Nationalist leaders Sukarno, Sjahrir and Hatta all used their sentences in internal exile during the 1930s to produce major contributions to the independence movement. While Sukarno was isolated in Flores and Bengkulu in 1930s he wrote and published essays. Sjahrir penned both *Out of Exile* and more importantly for the independence struggle, *Our Struggle (Perjuangan Kita)*, during his detention after 1934 at Boven Digul and Banda.⁴ Sharing that time at Boven Digul and Banda, Hatta wrote the more philosophical *An Introduction to Scientific Method (Pengantar ke Jalan Ilmu Pengetahuan)* and *The Nature of Greek Thought (Alam Pikiran Yunani)*.⁵ While the best known colonial era exiles were political leaders, during the New Order, exiles were largely students and cultural workers, including a substantial contingent of writers, academics, and journalists.

Indonesia after Independence

Symbolically, through the 1955 Bandung Asian-African Conference, President Sukarno demonstrated Indonesia's independent but active foreign policies (particularly in his balancing of relations vis-à-vis USA, USSR, and China) as he aspired to play a major diplomatic role on behalf of the Third World. Courting both East and West, he sought to maximise Indonesia's advantage during the Cold War. His foreign policy enabled hundreds of Indonesian students, teachers, writers, artists, journalists, and cultural workers to gain further experience abroad including in both the USSR and China.⁶ Soviet Premier Khrushchev, for example, invited Indonesians to come to the USSR and

³ Tan Malaka, *From Jail to Jail* (ed., trans and intro. By Helen Jarvis), Ohio University Center for International Studies, Athens, 1991.

⁴ Sutan Sjahrir, *Out of Exile* (transl. with Intro by Charles Wolf), Greenwood Press, New York, 1969 [1949]; and *Our struggle* (translated with an intro. by Benedict R. O'G. Anderson), Modern Indonesia Project, Cornell University, Ithaca, 1968.

⁵ Mohammad Hatta, *Alam pikiran Yunani*, Tintamas, Jakarta, 1964 (7th ed.); and *Pengantar ke djalan ilmu pengetahuan*, Pembangunan, Jakarta, 1964 (4th ed.)

⁶ Hong Liu, 'The Transnational Construction of "National Allegory": China and the Cultural Politics of Postcolonial Indonesia', *Critical Asian Studies*, 38:3, 2006, pp. 179-210.

offered a raft of scholarships during a visit to Indonesia in 1960, triggering a student flood. By 1965, about 2,000 Indonesians -- more than any other foreign nationality -- were studying in the USSR.⁷

Meanwhile, at home, internal political schisms had emerged, polarising the artistic community after 1955 elections. Artists and cultural workers were drawn into an increasingly public split between proponents of Socialist Realism, most notably the left-leaning Institute for People's Culture (LEKRA), and Universal Humanism, espoused by artists associated with the Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI)-aligned periodical *Siasat* (*Strategy*) and in particular its cultural column, *Gelanggang* (*Forum*). Common ground eroded amid heightened tensions after the Universal Humanists declared a Cultural Manifesto in 1963, which set them on a collision course with their more influential opponents.⁸ In the manifesto's wake, whether by coincidence or consequence, several major Universal Humanist writers chose to leave the country, to go into what might be interpreted as 'self-imposed exile' (or emigration), with Australia being one sought-after country of refuge. The writers M. Balfas, Achdiat Karta Mihardja and Idrus, for example, accepted posts at Sydney University, the Australian National University, and Monash University respectively around this time. By contrast, Australia held little attraction for those political or business figures who were also seeking an overseas haven, with the PSI leader Sumitro Djojohadikusumo preferring Malaysia, and Bachtar Lubis, the entrepreneur brother of detained writer Mochtar Lubis, relocating to Düsseldorf, Germany, for example.⁹

That thousands of Indonesians were being funded to go to the USSR and China as Indonesia inclined to the Left did not go unnoticed by anti-communists abroad. The Paris-based, US-sponsored organisation, the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF),

⁷ Alex Supartono and Lisabona Rachman, 'Studi Indonesia di Russia: Sebuah Rumah Sejarah yang Alpa Disinggahi', *Kompas*, 6 July 2001, <http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0107/06/dikbud/sebu39.htm>, sighted 5 January 2007.

⁸ See Keith Foulcher, *Social commitment in literature and the arts : the Indonesian 'Institute of People's Culture' 1950-1965*, Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, Clayton, 1986; 'The Manifesto is not dead' : *Indonesian literary politics thirty years on*, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, Clayton, 1994.

⁹ Australia had earlier been a site of exile for hundreds of Indonesian nationalists during the Japanese Occupation (see Jan Lingard, *Refugees And Rebels: Indonesian Exiles In Wartime Australia*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2008). Again, after 1965, a number of political exiles ended up living here including Soemarsono, who had been centrally involved in the so-called Madiun Affair of 1948. See Hersri Setiawan (2002) *Negara Madiun? Kesaksian Soemarsono Pelaku Perjuangan*, Fuspend, [Jakarta]

through staffer Ivan Kats, was actively seeking to strengthen links with Indonesian artists and intellectuals, a small Indonesian chapter of the organisation having been established (albeit rather haphazardly) in the mid-1950s. Kats conscientiously supplied reading materials, letters of encouragement, and modest support to anti-communist intellectuals in Indonesia, particularly those under political detention. Subsequently scholarships were organised by Kats for the young intellectuals Goenawan Mohammad and Arief Budiman to study in Europe. Leftists in Jakarta long suspected that the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was behind the CCF, but such suspicions remained unconfirmed until some months after the violence of October 1965, with the public unravelling of the connection in the USA in the late 1960s.¹⁰

Consequences of 1 October 1965

By 1965 Indonesia was home to the largest and most powerful communist party outside the Sino-Soviet bloc (and one inclining to Beijing rather than Moscow) but expectations that it would eventually achieve government through the polls were dashed after the events of 1 October 1965, Major-General Suharto's subsequent rise to power, and the sustained anti-communist pogrom. It took many anxious weeks for the implications for Indonesians abroad of the unfolding political circumstances in Jakarta to become clear, during which time they attempted to consult with colleagues in other countries to determine their best course of action. Communication between groups abroad was often difficult; for many, the decision to return to their homeland was a vexed one. When Suharto recalled Indonesian nationals in the USSR most complied; those who remained chose political exile.¹¹ Hundreds (if not thousands) of others were abroad elsewhere -- in the West, Albania, China, Cuba, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka -- either studying or as participants in a variety of regular cultural tours and delegations travelling and performing abroad. A sizeable delegation of cultural workers had left Jakarta on 27 September 1965, for example, to participate in Beijing's 1 October celebration of the anniversary of the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party. Their very presence at such an occasion would have marked their fate on their return to Indonesia.

¹⁰ I take up this issue of the role of the CCF in greater detail in David T. Hill, *Press, Prose, and Politics in Indonesia: A critical biography of Mochtar Lubis* (forthcoming).

¹¹ Supartono and Rahman, 2001.

In many locations, Indonesians abroad were assisted by host governments or local communist party sympathisers. For example, the New Order formally suspended diplomatic relations with China on 9 October 1967, but the Chinese state continued to provide ongoing welfare support for the Indonesian exile community which largely coalesced around the former ambassador, Djawoto, previously Editor-in-Chief of the national ANTARA news agency and Chair of the Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI). Globally ‘several thousand Indonesian citizens’ endured the following decades in exile ‘for fear of death or imprisonment’, including at least ‘several dozen writers, journalists, and artists’ who spent the most fecund period of their creative lives cut off from their homeland, afraid of retribution and retaliation against family or friends back in Indonesia.¹² For many it ended only with their deaths abroad. Rendered stateless after the New Order refused to renew passports abroad, most eventually gained foreign citizenship, as their only strategy to returning – if only for surreptitious visits -- to Indonesia.

Their predicament was complicated further by the Sino-Soviet split (which began in the late 1950s, but peaked in 1969). For Asahan Aidit, for example, who was studying in Moscow in the early 1960s, the warmth of Russian students towards him chilled as the PKI came to be seen increasingly as pro-China in a sharpening polarisation. Cut off from support from their homeland after September 1965, Indonesian students were left to bear the brunt of this communist superpower rivalry, with PKI leader D.N. Aidit widely regarded as having favoured the Maoist line. As Asahan recorded, ‘the elephants fight, [but] the mouse-deer is trampled to death’.¹³ The exiles were a fractured community, invariably split into political factions, unable to speak with one voice, even as they struggled to find asylum and security. Many were resident at various times initially in China, Vietnam, USSR, Albania, and more recently in Sweden, France, Netherlands, and UK.

¹² John H. McGlynn, J. H. and A.Kohar Ibrahim (eds) *Menagerie 6*, Lontar Foundation, Jakarta, 2004, p.229.

¹³ Asahan Alham Aidit, *Cinta, Perang dan Ilusi Antara Moskow- Hanoi*, Lembaga Humaniora, Depok, 2006, p.31.

Writers in exile

Yet virtually wherever they were located, they were vocal and productive. Paris-based exile J.J. Kusni (the poet formerly known as Kusni Sulang) noted the exiles ‘produced works, not only of literature but also created other types of works, such as dance, music, painting, drama, translations etc [and] gave birth to an exile press’.¹⁴ Their written output included autobiographies, novels (in both English and Indonesian), magazines and journals, poetry and drama, anthologies, short story collections, and essays. The common practice of using pseudonyms (some used up to 30!) makes tracking individuals difficult, but of at least two dozen exiled writers (mainly from LEKRA), several illustrate the communities’ complex biographical footprint.

Utuy Tatang Sontani (1920-79) was one of Indonesia’s greatest playwrights, with works translated into Russian, Estonian, Mandarin, Czech, German, Vietnamese, Dutch, and Italian. After a period in Beijing, he migrated to Moscow, where he lived till his death in 1979, teaching Indonesian language and literature at Moscow State University, and producing four novels and three autobiographical works. Sobron Aidit (1934-2007) and Asahan (Alham) Aidit (b.1938), younger brothers of PKI Chairman D.N. Aidit (who had been murdered by the army on 22 November 1965) illustrate the dilemmas many families faced. Asahan began his exile in Moscow (where he completed a Masters degree in philology), later spending 17 years in Vietnam (where he completed a PhD in Vietnamese language and literature), before eventually gaining asylum in Holland in 1984. After publishing short stories and poetry in exilic journals, since 1998 several of his (largely autobiographical) works have appeared in Jakarta.¹⁵ By contrast, in 1965 his older brother Sobron was Professor of Indonesian language and literature at Beijing Institute of Foreign Languages until reassigned to the countryside to work with the peasants during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). He ultimately gained political refuge in France, writing primarily for exilic journals but also frequently for the Indonesian media under some 25 pseudonyms. He published seven titles, including three short story

¹⁴ J.J. Kusni, ‘Sastra-Seni Eksil: Ungkapan Dari Dahsyatnya Penindasan ORBA’, *Cybersastra.net*, 22 August 2002, at <http://cybersastra.net/cgi-bin/naskah/viewesai.cgi?category=5&id=1029977204>, sighted 21 December 2006.

¹⁵ Asahan Aidit, *23 Sajak Menangisi Viet Tri*, Pustaka Jaya, Jakarta, 1998; *Perang dan kembang*, Pustaka Jaya, Jakarta, 2001; *Cinta, Perang dan Ilusi Antara Moskow- Hanoi*, Lembaga Humaniora, Depok, 2006a; and *Roman Memoar Alhamdulillah*, Lembaga Sastra Pembebasan, Jakarta, 2006b.

collections, two autobiographical studies, and a spiritual treatise, in Indonesia.¹⁶ His works appeared in Russian, Chinese, English, Bulgarian, Dutch, German and French.¹⁷

Utuy Tatang Sontani and the Aidit brothers are but three of dozens of Indonesian artists in exile who remained productive despite long years of isolation. Other recognizable names in both exilic publications and, after 1998, in Indonesia-based outlets, include the poet Agam Wispi (1930-2003), the poet and essayist Kusni Sulang (Jean-Jacques Kusni) (b. 1940), former *Indonesia Raya*, *Harian Rakyat* and *Ekonomi Nasional* journalist A. Umar Said (known in exile as André Aumars), essayist A. Kohar Ibrahim (known also as D. Tanaera) (b. 1942), Acehnese poet Z. Afif (1936-2004), and one of Indonesia's most celebrated painters Basuki Resobowo (c.1917-99).

Recording their stories:

A variety of periodicals and occasional publications were produced by Indonesian exiles in Albania (*Api*, *Indonesian Tribune*), China (*S.R.I.* [*Suara Rakyat Indonesia*]), France (*Kancah*), Finland (*Tekad Rakyat*), Moscow (*Marhaen Menang*, *OPI*), and the Netherlands (*Aksi Setiawkawan*, *Arah*, *Arena*, *Kreasi Sastra dan Seni*, *Mimbar Informasi Studi Diskusi*, *Pembaruan*).¹⁸ While noting that an 'exhaustive list of this Indonesian exile literature has yet to be compiled', McGlynn and Ibrahim cite 27 titles published just in Europe (primarily Amsterdam and Culemborg, but also London, Limburg, and Rotterdam).¹⁹

Early modes of lobbying and information dissemination were – certainly by today's standards – slow, plainly looking, and lacking a sense of urgency. With the spread of the internet, however, at least one of these periodicals, *Kreasi*, appeared online,

¹⁶ Sobron Aidit, *Cerita dari Tanah Pengasingan*, Penerbit Pustaka Pena, Jakarta, 1999; *Kisah intel dan sebuah warung*, Garba Budaya, Jakarta, 2000; *Aidit : abang, sahabat dan guru di masa pergolakan*, Yayasan Nuansa Cendekia, Bandung, 2003; *Razia Agustus : kumpulan cerpen* Gramedia Pustaka Utama, Jakarta, 2004; *Memoar Sobron Aidit : penalti tanpa wasit*. Grasindo, Jakarta, 2005a; *Catatan spiritual di balik sosok Sobron Aidit*, BPK Gunung Mulia, Jakarta, 2005b; *Prajurit yang bodoh*, Gramedia Pustaka Utama, Jakarta, 2006.

¹⁷ Tintin Wulia is making a film about Sobron Aidit with the working title *Pulang* (Going Home), for which extensive footage, including interviews with him, had been shot prior to Sobron's death. See <http://tintinwulia.com/?cat=15>.

¹⁸ David T. Hill, 'A Note on Further Reading' (pp.115-22) in Ruth Havelaar, *Quartering: The story of a marriage in Indonesia during the Eighties*, (ed. and intro D. T. Hill), Monash CSEAS, Clayton, 1991; McGlynn and Ibrahim, 2004.

¹⁹ McGlynn and Ibrahim 2004:229.

enabling exilic writing to reach a wider readership.²⁰ Despite their advanced age, Net-savvy émigré and exile intellectuals and artists, like Umar Said, J.J. Kusni, and A. Kohar Ibrahim, established their own websites and participated actively on a variety of email lists and internet communities.²¹ The Internet enabled a younger generation in Indonesia, as they developed a curiosity about the exiles and their fate, to communicate easily, instantly, with these older exiles, via their various websites.

A handful of exiles have published in Indonesia after the political reforms of 1998. Most active has been Hersri Setiawan, who has undertaken both autobiographical works and the most concerted attempt to record oral histories.²² During his period of exile (following his release from Buru penal island) from his base in the Netherlands, he travelled around Europe when circumstances and funding permitted, and made extensive autobiographical recordings of leftist exiles. A selection is available in the collection 'In Search of Silenced Voices: Indonesian Exiles of the Left' at Amsterdam's International Institute of Social History (IISH).²³ Hersri Setiawan also helped establish the Foundation for Indonesian History and Culture in the Netherlands, and has published various biographical works and analytical studies based on his detailed research.²⁴ Greater scholarly interest is evident since the fall of Suharto, manifest through the publication of volumes such Lontar's *Menagerie 6* and the University of Hawai'i journal *Manoa*'s special issue on *Silenced Voices* from Indonesia.²⁵

²⁰ <http://www.xs4all.nl/~badjasur/kreasi/colofon.htm>. On the internet in Indonesia more generally, see David T. Hill & Krishna Sen, *The Internet in Indonesia's New Democracy*, Routledge, London & New York, 2005.

²¹ Umar Said's site is <http://kontak.club.fr/index.htm> (sighted 26 June 2008 and still active). A. Kohar Ibrahim's is *ABE-Kreasi Multiply Site*, <http://16j42.multiply.com/> (sighted 27 June 2008, still active). A selection of mailing list contributions can be found in Sobron Aidit and Budi Kurniawan, *Melawan dengan Restoran*, Mediakita, Jakarta, 2007.

²² See particularly Hersri Setiawan (published under pseudonym: Teguh) *Catatan di Sela-sela Intaian*, Yayasan Langer, Limburg, 1981; and Hersri Setiawan, *Aku eks-tapol* Galang Press, Yogyakarta, 2003a, and *Diburu di Pulau Buru*, Galang Press, Yogyakarta, 2006.

²³ Details of the collections can be found at: <http://www.iisg.nl/collections/silencedvoices/index.php>

²⁴ Francisca C. Fanggidaej, *Memoar Perempuan Revolusioner*, [ditulis oleh Hersri Setiawan] Galang Press, Yogyakarta, 2006; Hersri Setiawan, *Negara Madiun: kesaksian Soemarsono pelaku perjuangan*, Forum Studi Perubahan dan Peradaban, Jakarta, 2002; and *Kamus Gestok*, Galang Press, Yogyakarta, 2003b.

²⁵ Frank Stewart & John H. McGlynn (eds) *Silenced Voices*, Manoa, Vol. 12:1, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2000.

Australians' response to the plight of the Exiles

Australia's lack of attention to the victims of the 1965-66 massacres whether by the media, politicians or academe is gradually being noted.²⁶ Even less concern was directed to the plight of the exiles. What notice was paid tended to be personal, individual, and rarely elevated to the 'scholarly' domain. One striking exception appears to be that of Harry Aveling, who maintained correspondence with Utuy Tatang Sontani, producing in the year of the playwright's death in Moscow, a study *Man and society in the works of the Indonesian playwright Utuy Tatang Sontani* (including a translation of Sontani's play *Awal and Mira*).²⁷ In late 1978 Sontani also sent Aveling copies of his typescript *Kolot Kolotok*, together with a retyped copy of his previously published 1963 four-act play *Tak Pernah Menjadi Tua [Never Growing Old]*.²⁸ Beyond rare academic studies like Aveling's, there was only an occasional ripple of awareness in academic circles, stimulated by an irregular exilic newsletter.

If one reflects critically upon the prevailing, if unarticulated, view of the time, in our 'knowing Indonesia' from afar we were apprehensive at the possible loss of access to the country if we offended the New Order government. What outrage there was focussed on other issues such as political prisoners in Indonesia as reports of Buru filtered out from the early 1970s.

A key role was played by organisations like *Tapol* (originally called the British Campaign for the Release of Indonesian Political Prisoners) and networks of activists and sympathisers who organised speaking tours across Australian campuses in the 1970s and 1980s by human rights activists like *Tapol* founder and former political prisoner, Carmel Budiardjo.²⁹ Other engaged academics like Dutch sociologist Wim Wertheim or French political scientist Jacques Leclerc wrote in the exiles' publications

²⁶ E.g. 'Accomplices in Atrocity: The Indonesian killings of 1965', *ABC Radio Hindsight* program, 7 September 2008, transcript downloadable from <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/hindsight/stories/2008/2356330.htm#transcript> (sighted Friday, 26 September 2008). Though as yet unpublished, Richard Tanter has been engaged in a ongoing scholarly analysis of the lack of response from academe and media in Australia.

²⁷ Harry Aveling, *Man and society in the works of the Indonesian playwright Utuy Tatang Sontani*, Southeast Asian Studies Program, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, 1979.

²⁸ I would like to thank Harry Aveling for giving me copies of these documents by Sontani. *Tak Pernah Menjadi Tua* was originally published in *Teruna Bhakti*, No. 31, Yr 1, June 1963.

²⁹ On *Tapol*, see <http://tapol.gn.apc.org/about.htm>, (sighted 29 September 2008) and Carmel Budiardjo, *Surviving Indonesia's gulag: a Western woman tells her story*, Cassell, London, [1996].

or spoke on such issues during academic visits to Australia. Despite such advocates abroad, the exiles had a much lower profile in Australia than in Europe, for example, never really entering our sights as we focussed more narrowly upon Indonesia-based politics.

Even in the rare cases where exiles were living in Australia, it was generally not Australian scholars but Indonesians who took the initiative to investigate. In the case of Soemarsono, a leftist directly involved in the 1948 Madiun Affair, for example, it was the ever-active Hersri Setiawan (with assistance from Arief Budiman) who made the journey to Australia from the Netherlands, with funding from the Ford Foundation through Amsterdam's International Institute of Social History, to interview, document and write up Soemarsono's autobiographical accounts of the Madiun Affair and his detention after 1965.³⁰

Personally, I recall only a vague awareness in late 1970s of the plight of the exiles. That was largely due to Herb Feith, who gave me contact details for some exilic publications. The newsletters' appearance was basic, and their contents often dated in that pre-internet era. Whether in Indonesian or English, they were burdened with the rather dense prose of Cold War agit-prop. But they did make their way into not only individuals' mail-boxes, but also Australian libraries. For example, one of the most regular, *The Voice of the Indonesian People (Suara Rakyat Indonesia)*, published in Beijing by the Indonesian Organization for Afro-Asian People's Solidarity, appeared in the Monash library from April 1971.³¹

During two years of fieldwork in Jakarta (1980-82) in the early years after the release of the last of the untried political prisoners, I became aware they were re-connecting with their former comrades abroad.³² I struck up a correspondence with the poet Z. Afif, who was then teaching Indonesian in China's Guangzhou Institute of Foreign Languages and researching Indonesian literary history, the resulting publication of which he sent me.³³

³⁰ Hersri Setiawan 2002.

³¹ In addition, the National Library of Australia holds *Indonesian Tribune*, produced by *Indonesia Progresif* in Tirana, Albania, between 1966-1972, initially as a monthly then as a quarterly.

³² I discuss this re-connection in David T. Hill, *Who's Left? Indonesian Literature in the Early 1980s*, Working Paper, Monash Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Clayton, 1984.

³³ Z. Afif, *Sastra Indonesia: Angkatan dan Periodisasi*, Jurusan Bahasa Indonesia, Institut Bahasa Asing Guangzhou, Guangzhou, 1984.

Inside Indonesia subsequently published a short article he wrote about the poetry of Ariel Heryanto, but I lost contact when he gained sanctuary in Sweden.³⁴ In 1993, during a brief trip to France and Holland some exiles kindly gave me copies of their self-published works, including a selection of writings by the prolific artist Basuki Resobowo.³⁵

A major stimulus in public consciousness was media coverage in Indonesia concerning the exiles' *Indonesia* restaurant in Rue de Vaugirard, Paris. Set up in December 1982 as a cooperative by Paris-based exiles, notably Umar Said, Budiman Sudharsono, Sobron Aidit and Kusni Sulang, it achieved a level of popularity that attracted high-profile visitors.³⁶ Occasional mentions in media articles or published interviews with people like Arief Budiman or Goenawan Mohamad drew attention to the restaurant and the exile community that sustained it. But there was nothing comparable in Australia to attract attention to the exiles. We may have known, but remained largely silent.

Conclusion.

As a community of scholars in Australia our apparent reluctance to engage with, and learn from, the exile communities was a missed opportunity to understand better the dynamics of Indonesian political history. As a consequence we may have failed to appreciate the resilience of the Indonesian Left and been less conscious of alternative, critical interpretations of Indonesian history. It was an opportunity I suspect we traded off for more assured access to Indonesia itself, having judged that to be more important than the moral or intellectual value of an association with, and understanding of, exilic communities. No consideration was given, for example, to the extent to which the Indonesian exilic communities' texts, activities, and identities might have been able to contribute to Indonesia's transition from authoritarian to post-authoritarian politics. One can now only speculate on the insights that might have been gained, and the moves towards reconciliation that might have been put in place had we taken the time to listen to, and engage more positively with, Indonesian exiles. If, over the three decades of the New Order, as academics in Australia we were struggling in our own attempts at

³⁴ Z. Afif, 'Literature for the people', *Inside Indonesia*, No. 11. August 1987, pp.28.

³⁵ On Basuki Resobowo, see David T. Hill, 'Basuki Resobowo: Creative energies in exile', *Inside Indonesia*, No. 36, September 1993, pp.38-41.

³⁶ On its establishment, see Sobron Aidit and Budi Kurniawan, 2007.

‘knowing Indonesia from afar’, how much more dispiriting must that quest have been for those at even greater distance in exile, whose insights and perspectives were disregarded or undervalued.

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